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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
December 9, 2018  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Philippians 1:3-11, Luke 3:1-6  
Hymns: 63; 61; 75; 73:4-5 (73:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Malachi 3:1-4

<sup>1</sup> "Behold, I send My messenger,  
And he will prepare the way before Me.  
And the Lord, whom you seek,  
Will suddenly come to His temple,  
Even the Messenger of the covenant,  
In whom you delight.  
Behold, He is coming,"  
Says the Lord of hosts.

<sup>2</sup> "But who can endure the day of His coming?  
And who can stand when He appears?  
For He is like a refiner's fire  
And like launderers' soap.

<sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver;  
He will purify the sons of Levi,  
And purge them as gold and silver,  
That they may offer to the Lord  
An offering in righteousness.

<sup>4</sup> "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem  
Will be pleasant to the Lord,  
As in the days of old,  
As in former years. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

**INTRO:** John the Baptist

Each Advent season we spend at least one meditation on the ministry and message of John the Baptist. It is fitting for us to do this because Advent is not only a time when we consider the Lord's coming, but directly tied to that is our spiritual preparation for the Lord's coming. Our text this morning is one of the prophecies regarding the coming of John the Baptist. This Scripture is not only quoted in the gospels in reference to John and his ministry but Jesus Himself cites this Scripture as being fulfilled by John. (Matthew 11:10) Jesus was emphasizing the importance of John's ministry, and that all should heed John's message for themselves.

May the Spirit of our God open our hearts to receive --

**THEME: John's Message Concerning Jesus.**

### **I. Acknowledge the Glory of the Lord**

So our text speaks of John as a messenger from God who will direct our attention to the Savior: and that is exactly what John did. With his own eyes he saw the signs confirming our Savior's true identity when Jesus was baptized. He witnessed the Spirit descending as dove and landing on Jesus and abiding there. He heard the voice of God the Father declaring Jesus to be His Son. Of course John already knew these things about Jesus or John would not have protested that he should be baptized by Jesus, instead of John baptizing Jesus.

So what the difference? The difference is that this was a direct revelation from God in heaven for John to communicate to his audience, which John did. He pointed to Jesus saying, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29) For months before this John had been preaching out by the Jordan River, calling people to repentance, preparing hearts for the coming of the Promised Messiah. Then some forty days after the

baptism event John had the opportunity to point Jesus out to his audience as that One who was to come!

In our text Malachi speaks of how the One who was to come, for whom the chosen of God were watching and waiting would come into His temple. Malachi himself spoke from those courts of the temple built following Jews returning from Babylonian captivity. He spoke to a people who were already slipping back into spiritual lethargy. He prophesied of the Lord's coming which was still four hundred years in the future. But it would be there, in those same temple courts that the Christ would appear, **right in those same temple courts!**

And so Jesus came into this world and He stood in the temple courts, and He revealed Himself to the people, ALL the people as the Messenger of the Covenant.

Messenger of the Covenant is a special title that Malachi was given for the Messiah. Messenger of the Covenant was more than just Jesus preaching of the coming of the kingdom of God. Jesus was the One to bring the Kingdom of God. Jesus was the fulfillment of the covenant of God's grace. Was it also significant that Jesus would appear in the temple courts? Yes, for that was where thousands of sacrifices for sin were offered to God year after year. All those symbolic sacrifices of the Day of Atonement or the Passover festivals, or the individual and daily sacrifices for sins; all those sacrifices couldn't remove the blot of a single sin, or its guilt and condemnation.

But then Jesus came on the scene as the Messenger of the Covenant and He Himself became the sacrifice for our sins. He was the sacrifice that was made once for all sin, for all sinners, for all time. Jesus fulfilled the Covenant of God's grace. Jesus by His death and resurrection secured the peace, peace between us and God. He is the Lord our Righteousness, and we are to acknowledge His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

Our text moves on to the next point of preparation:

## **II. Purify Your Hearts and Lives.**

Malachi lays the challenge before us, and rightfully so:

**Malachi 3:2-3** “But who can endure the day of His coming?  
And who can stand when He appears?  
For He is like a refiner’s fire  
And like launderers’ soap.  
<sup>3</sup>He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver;  
He will purify the sons of Levi,  
And purge them as gold and silver,

The glory of the Lord is beyond amazing, it is terrifying. Indeed we are taught that “*our God is a consuming fire!*” (Deut. 4:24, Hebrews 12:29) When we see ourselves in light of God’s law, when we see the holiness of God, we also must shrink back in horror because of our sin and the wrath of God which we rightfully deserve! When we think of Jesus as the Messenger of the Covenant we are led to see the imposition of the grace of God that delivers us from death. Yes, Jesus shall also be a consuming fire in the final judgment, but in contrast to that He serves as a **launderer’s soap**. He washes clean that which was filthy. We have been cleansed by the blood of Christ. His blood cleanses us from all sin. He is the satisfying payment that perfectly appeases the wrath of God, not only for your sins and mine, but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 1:7; 2:2)

Our text goes on to speak of the refining of our faith, and the purifying of our lives. This isn’t the only Scripture that makes reference the Lord refining the faith of those whom He loves. Peter reminds us in his first epistle that this is part of God’ preservation of our faith. Knowing that the Lord works in all things for our good and blessing (Romans 8:28) we can rejoice even in tribulation. “*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,*” (1 Peter 1:6-7)

Our text directs our attention to purifying of the sons of Levi. It directs special attention to the purification of this group of people because they were the ones who were designated to offer sacrifices to the Lord. We need to understand what this means for us. Now that we are God’s holy people, He has designated us to be a royal

priesthood. There is no longer a designated tribe or a special class within the people of God who alone are worthy to bring offerings to the Lord. This is us! It is our time to --

### **III. Prepare an Acceptable Offering.**

**Malachi 3:3-4** He will purify the sons of Levi,  
And purge them as gold and silver,  
That they may offer to the Lord  
An offering in righteousness.

<sup>4</sup>“Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem  
Will be pleasant to the Lord,  
As in the days of old,  
As in former years.

This purifying this purging that our text speaks of is something that makes us precious to God. That has to start with what it cost the Lord. Paul wrote of this in Titus. “*Jesus gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.*” (Titus 2:14)

Jesus suffered with a purpose and a goal that He might purify for Himself His own special people, that being us. He suffered to purify us that we might be His people, that we might be zealous of good works. We consider this in connection with the Lord’s continuing care for us as we make our way through the trials and tribulations of this life, and we see how in His faithfulness toward us we are purged of the slag, the fears or the affection for this world with its lusts, or false trusts. It is so much easier for our flesh to trust money, or insurance policies, or doctors or lawyers all that we can see and feel with our hands than it is to trust the Lord. Throughout life the Lord purifies us of these false trusts, and reveals to us His faithfulness. We are drawn ever closer to the Lord and the salvation He has secured for us in our eternal home. In this He has prepared us to present acceptable offering before Him.

Now, we in our minds can lose the distinction between sacrifices and offerings. I mean they were all sacrifices right? Our text is specific that these are the equivalent of thank offerings. Sacrifices that were to serve as reminders of man’s need for cleansing always

involved blood, they were animal sacrifices, and they all symbolized the sacrifice Jesus would make in payment for our sin. That ended with Jesus' death on the cross. There is no more payment for sin. Then there was the offering in response to that cleansing; that's the word Malachi uses in our text and that's where we are isn't it? What does the Lord hope to see from us? For what offering has He prepared us? It begins with the offering of our lives, of our behavior. Are we putting the Lord first in our lives? Are we saying "NO" to sin, and "YES" to righteousness? Are we loving God and our neighbor as we ought? These are the first offerings that we ought to bring, for they show a true appreciation of His love for us evident in His sacrifice.

The offerings in our text were classified as grain offerings, a portion of which were burned to the Lord, most of which were reserved for the priests for their support. Connected to these were offerings like tithes, that percentage of crops or income given to the Lord. Grain offerings also could be substituted with cash equivalents. These all come closest to what we think of as regular church offerings. They also had what we call "free will" offerings. We can identify with that: our flesh right away thinks that means I am allowed to give little or nothing if that is what I choose. That is not a fair evaluation of God's hopes regarding His Redeemed children.

So we also understand that the Lord has purified and prepared us, and brought us to a place in our lives that we consider the wonder of the blessings of our salvation and the gospel of His grace and peace as a continuing presence in our lives, and we thank Him for it! In response we may bring special gifts on special festival days like Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, days when we highlight the grace and blessing of our God. But even as God is gracious all through the year so we ought to be consistent in our thank offerings to Him.

Let us consider a proper response in view of how He has blessed us in our hearts and prospered us in our lives. He isn't looking for trifles. He **is** looking for a gift that comes from our hearts as we love Him who first loved us. He is looking for us to give freely, cheerfully from a heart of faith to Him who loved us and blesses all with such grace and generosity.

So again this Advent season let us hear the voice of John the Baptist who directs our attention to the glory of the Lord, our coming Lord. The Lord who has purified us from all sin, and who Himself prepared us to offer Him gifts worthy of His grace.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.